

FEATURE

Reaching new heights ...

6-foot-9-inch drill instructor towers over recruits, trains at a whole different level

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On pick-up morning, recruits’ emotions have already been worn thin by the mental and physical stress of their new environment. They have reached the height of anticipation, for they are about to meet the three men that will transform them from civilians to Marines. Nothing can be more intimidating, or at least that is what they are thinking.

For when one of those men steps through the hatch and appears more mountain than man, intimidation no longer captures the recruits’ emotions.

“I drive a Honda Accord and I get a hard time about it, too,” said Senior Drill Instructor Staff Sgt. Louis Starnes, Platoon 3040, India Co., 3rd RTBn., “Every time my drill instructors see me get out of the car, they say it reminds them of the clowns in the circus getting out of that tiny little car. I have even had the military police and Provost Marshal’s Office stop me and tell me that I need to wear my cover while I’m driving, but I can’t because there’s no head space for my cover.”

Starnes is 6 feet, 9 inches tall and has to duck his head every time he walks through a doorway.

“A lot of my recruits tell me at their graduation, that they look back on the very first days of training when they got out of receiving and were introduced to their drill instructors,” said the Atlanta native. “They saw me duck my head as I was coming out of the drill instructor hut so that I wouldn’t knock my cover

off and they were really scared and wondering what they had gotten themselves into.”

Being this tall is a more intimidating factor, Starnes added. He said his presence over the recruits was, by itself, more intimidating than just being a drill instructor.

The recruits respect Starnes a lot, said Staff Sgt. Arturo Zapata, a drill instructor for the platoon.

“They have no other choice but to listen to him,” said Zapata. “He doesn’t yell a lot and he hardly ever gets upset, but if he does get upset with the recruits, they fear him a whole lot more.”

“I don’t have to yell or raise my voice at the recruits as much as the green belt drill instructors do,” said Starnes.

“Even when I was a green belt drill instructor, I yelled and ran around acting crazy, but I don’t think I did it as much as the other green belts did,” he said. “I think they had to put more stress on the recruits in order to get their intimidation level up.”

Not all recruits that come through recruit training are shaken by the term drill instructor.

“The older recruits that come into training aren’t as intimidated by the shorter drill instructors as the rest of the recruits are,” said Starnes. “So when they see me,

it’s a big surprise for them.”

Sergeant Paul Nixon, one of Starnes’ drill instructors, said when he first saw Starnes all he could think about was the movie, Deuce Biggilo, Male Giggilo.

“He was so tall and that was the only thought running through my mind about him at the time,” Nixon said with a smile.

Being so tall also has its disadvantages for Starnes.

“I wear sizes 14 1/2 and 15 in shoes and my arms and legs are too long for the uniforms that are already at clothing sales,” Starnes said. “I don’t have the luxury of buying things from clothing sales like the other Marines do.”

“My Alpha blouse has to be special ordered because on the other blouses, the sleeves are too short, and my trousers have to be special ordered because my legs are way longer than what they sell at clothing sales,” laughed Starnes. “I even have to order my shoes off of the Internet.”

“My drill instructors laugh because my NCO sword is even bigger than everyone else’s,” Starnes added.

“People on base see me and they always say ‘you’re that drill instructor for 3rd RTBn., aren’t you?’” Starnes laughed. “They already know me by my reputation.”

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- Senior Drill Instructor Staff Sgt. Louis Starnes, Platoon 3040, India Co., 3rd RTBn.



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Six-foot, 9-inch Senior Drill Instructor Staff Sgt. Louis Starnes, Platoon 3040, India Co., 3rd RTBn., gives a class on proper uniform wear in the squadbay March 24. Starnes said because he is so tall he has to special order all his uniform items.